

A Ministry of Reconciliation or How to Make a Quilt  
1 of 3: Reconciled to God  
2 Corinthians 5:16-21

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I have been working on this quilt for my husband Corey. It's made up of his old t-shirts. These shirts are from different parts of his life. There are shirts from his year as a young adult volunteer missionary in Northern Ireland where he worked in a circus for Catholic and Protestant youth. Another is from his year in volunteer missionary service in Ghana. My favorite was made for him by a friend who had heard his Starbucks story. While waiting in line in Starbucks Corey overheard the person in front of him in line try to order a small coffee. The barista called out "one tall coffee." And the man said, "No, a small coffee." The barista responded, "At Starbucks, small is tall." All of Corey's old t-shirts are becoming a new creation.

In the text today we read, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" There is some debate among biblical scholars about what the Greek means when it says that the old has passed away. Some think that the old has left and been replaced by the new. Others think that the old has been transformed into something new – the same stuff, just re-imagined, re-used, renewed. I like that. I think that we are new creations, not because we become something different than we were, but because what we were has been transformed and used in a new way.

All of this happens through reconciliation – we have been reconciled to God through Christ.

In Jesus humanity and divinity are reconciled – two things that feel like polar opposites are brought together. In the great musical Camelot King Arthur discovers that his queen Guinevere and his knight and best friend Sir Lancelot are in love he gives an impassioned speech about the conflict in his soul between being a man whose anger and deep hurt demand vengeance and a king who seeks a way of right and not just might.

In Jesus, two natures seem to be even further apart than Arthur's manhood and kingship. How then is it possible that Jesus brings together divinity and humanity? Two whats are in one who.

In Jesus his humanity is always obedient to his divinity. So while the differences between his humanity and divinity are far greater than the differences between Arthur's being a man and being a king, in Jesus being human and being divine are never in conflict. He engages the world as a man – he eats, he touches, he walks, in one healing story, he even spits. Jesus sleeps, he suffers, he dies. His ministry could not have happened if he weren't a man. But that humanity was obedient to the divinity – he loved his enemies, he forgave those who hurt him, he saw the value in each person.

In Jesus God reconciled humanity and divinity – he brought together two things that feel irreconcilable. He forever changed what it means to be human. We share the same humanity as the Word of God.

In Jesus God reconciles two seemingly opposing identities – human and divine. In Jesus God also reconciles our broken relationship. This isn't about how Jesus' death appeased an angry God. It's about how Jesus came and stood with us to bridge the gap we had created.

I meet people a lot who joke about lightning striking if they came to church. And I hear mock sighs of relief as they leave worship that the roof didn't collapse because they were there. I know most folks are just joking about having been absent from church for a long time. But sometimes there is something more there – a deep sense of not belonging; a firm belief that they are so broken and so far from God that they don't dare go into God's presence. Some of us read Anne LaMotte's book Traveling Mercies this winter. Do you remember the part where Anne sits on the front steps of the church not daring to go in? She sits there, hung over often, in the middle of an affair with a married man, and listens to the music. She is drawn to the church, but not able to go in. She believes she has run so far from God, that there is no going back.

One night, strung out on drugs, involved with another married man, Anne was seriously ill, near death in fact. And she felt God sneak into her room like a cat, before she could slam the door. And God simply stayed with her. God came into her place of brokenness and bridged the gap.

Years ago I read a book called Jesus the Savior that helped me understand Jesus. In it, the author writes, "We were running away from God, looking for a place to hide, and we found that God was running beside us, sharing our fear and shame." (Placher, p. 141.)

In that reconciliation we are made new. The old isn't wiped away. We are still who we were, but what we thought separated us from God becomes the very stuff that God will use. Lenny, a recovering alcoholic, talks about how his drinking lost him his health, his livelihood and almost his family. He now talks about that time without shame. He regrets how his past actions hurt people he cares about and wishes he hadn't so damaged his health. But his past no longer defines him.

In Jesus we are reconciled to God and we are new creations. We are invited to a ministry of reconciliation. Over the next two weeks we will look at what the ministry looks like – what does it look like in our personal relationships and what does it look like to reconcile beyond old boundaries? Who do we need to reach out to with the good news of God's love?

I love old quilts. I borrowed these two from my friend whom some of you have met – the Rev. Jenny Weber. They are both quilts made from scraps. When I look at this one I wonder what the pieces of fabric were before they became part of this quilt. Were they scraps from left over projects? Were they from clothes that weren't useful anymore because of being too well worn or did the wearer outgrew them? When we are reconciled to God we are made new. God doesn't toss aside who we were and put something new in its place. Instead, in making us new, God takes what we are and fashions it into new. Like old pieces of fabric being made into a quilt.

You received a scrap of fabric this morning with your bulletin. This morning this fabric represents you. If you would like to participate in the ongoing work of being

reconciled to God, I invite you to bring your piece of fabric forward and weave it into the frame of what will become a quilt.